

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07

FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 USIA-06 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03

SP-02 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 AGR-05 CAB-02

FAA-00 DOTE-00 IGA-02 INT-05 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SS-15 /106 W
----- 001263

R 181055Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9060

C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 1185

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: OTRA, OCON

SUBJ: VISIT OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLAKE TO LIBERIA

REF: MONROVIA 1051

1. SUMMARY. DURING HIS 4-1/2 DAYS IN LIBERIA, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLAKE HAD A VERY PRODUCTIVE VISIT DISCUSSING THE ANGOLA ISSUE WITH FONMIN OFFICIALS, PROBLEMS OF SOIL SURVEY AND TITLE 1 PL-480 WITH THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, AND MANPOWER TRAINING WITH THE MINISTER OF PLANNING. DIFFICULTIES OF DOING BUSINESS IN LIBERIA WERE TOUCHED ON DURING CALLS MADE ON VANPLY AND FIRESTONE OFFICIALS. THE UPCOMING CIVIL AVIATION TALKS AND REQUEST FOR NAVIGATIONAL AIDS WERE MENTIONED BY THE ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR TRANSPORTATION. THE LIMITED CAPACITY OF THE PORT OF GREENVILLE AND ITS EFFECT ON VANPLY WERE AIRED WITH THE LATTER AND THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF FINANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLAKE SPENT PRODUCTIVE FOUR AND HALF DAYS OF INTENSIVE BRIEFING AND FRANK DISCUSSIONS WITH GOL OFFICIALS,

U.S. MISSION PERSONNEL AND AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN. BLAKE

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ADMITTED THAT HIS FIRST VISIT TO LIBERIA HAD CAUSED HIM TO

RETHINK SOME OF HIS PRECONCEIVED IDEAS ABOUT LIBERIA AND GIVEN HIM A GREATER APPRECIATION OF AND FAMILIARITY WITH THE PROBLEMS FACING THE COUNTRY.

3. IN A MEETING WITH MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE RUSS THE LATTER MENTIONED THE DIFFICULTIES OF ATTEMPTING AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT A SOIL SURVEY OF THE ENTIRE COUNTRY - SOMETHING THAT WAS DONE BY COLONIAL POWERS IN MOST IF NOT ALL FORMER AFRICAN COLONIES. RUSS ALSO MENTIONED DESIRABILITY OF HAVING TITLE I PL-480 PROGRAM OF ABOUT DOLLARS 2 MILLION FOR RICE. BLAKE SAID HE WOULD LOOK INTO THIS MATTER. BLAKE WONDERED WHETHER MINISTER HAD CONSIDERED POSSIBILITY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS PARTICIPATING IN LARGE SCALE PLANTATION AGRICULTURE PLANNED BY GOL WITH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FROM IVORY COAST. MINISTER OF PLANNING NEAL EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT WITH EMPHASIS ON SIMPLE SKILLS WHICH COULD BE ACQUIRED THROUGH APPROPRIATE VOCATIONAL TRAINING.

4. BALKE'S CALL AT FOREIGN MINISTRY WAS REPORTED IN REFTEL.

5. VISIT TO VANPLY'S FACILITIES AT GREENVILLE DISCLOSED THE INADEQUACY OF PORT OF GREENVILLE IN HANDLING FIRM'S OUTPUT. THE PORT CONGESTION WILL BECOME WORSE WHEN PLYWOOD PRODUCTION BEGINS NEXT MONTH. TWO SHIPS REPORTEDLY SAILED AWAY RECENTLY AFTER WAITING SEVERAL DAYS TO LOAD. VANPLY OFFICIALS WERE EMBARRASSED WHEN QUESTIONED WHY THIS MATTER HAD NOT BEEN THOROUGHLY INVESTIAGED BEFORE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DOLLARS 30-40 MILLION PLANT BEGAN.

6. DURING BRIEF STOPOVER AT HARBEL, PRESIDENT JOHN P. CARMICHAEL OF IFRESTONE PLANTATIONS COMPANY REMARKED THAT THE DAYS OF LARGE CONCESSIONNAIRES LIKE FIRESTONE WERE NUMBERED. ALTHOUGH FIRESTONE PAYS TAXES, CARMICHAEL COMPLAINED THAT THE COMPANY IS BEING CONSTANTLY ASKED TO EXPAND AND UPGRADE THE EDUCATIONAL AND MEDICAL FACILITIES IT PROVIDES ITS EMPLOYEES. HE IMPLIED THAT THE COMPANY CAN ONLY DO SO MUCH. CARMICHAEL COMMENTED THAT THE INDEPENDENT LIBERIAN RUBBER GROWERS WERE NOT REPLACING THEIR OVER-AGE TREES. FIRESTONE HAD STOPPED REPLANTING PENDING RENEGOTIATION (SUSPENDED SINCE MAY 1975) OF ITS CONCESSION AGREEMENT.

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7. IN ABSENCE OF MINISTERS OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND TRANSPORTATION AND OF FINANCE, WHO WERE CALLED TO AN EMERGENCY CABINET MEETING, BLAKE MET WITH ASSISTANT MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION CAMPBELL AND DEPUTY MINISTER OF FINANCE PADMORE. CAMPBELL STATED HE EXPECTS IN THE UPCOMING AVIATION TALKS IN WASHINGTON TO CONCLUDE A CIVIL AIR AGREEMENT PROVIDING AMONG OTHER THINGS THE RIGHT OF A LIBERIAN CARRIER TO SERVE THE U.S.

BLAKE REPLIED THAT WASHINGTON WAS ONLY EXPECTING TO DISCUSS CIVIL AVIATION MATTERS OF MUTUAL INTEREST TO BOTH PARTIES. CAMPBELL WAS ENCOURAGED TO LET THE EMBASSY KNOW IN WRITING JUST WHAT HE THOUGHT SHOULD BE ON THE AGENDA FOR THE TALKS. BLAKE IMPRESSED UPON HIM THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING SO TO AVOID ANY MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS. IN REPLY TO HIS REQUEST FOR SURPLUS NAVIGATIONAL AIDS, CAMPBELL WAS ASKED TO SUBMIT LIST TO EMBASSY. BLAKE MENTIONED NEED TO EXPAND PORT OF GREENVILLE IMMEDIATELY SO THAT VANPLY AND OTHERS IN SINOE COUNTY ARE NOT HINDERED IN EXPORTING THEIR OUTPUT OF FOREST PRODUCTS. AT THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE, BLAKE BROUGHT UP AGAIN THE PROBLEM OF THE PORT OF GREENVILLE. DEPUTY MINISTER PADMORE CONFESSED HE HAD NOT HEARD ABOUT THIS AND PROMISED TO LOOK INTO THE MATTER.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MONROV01185
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760060-0998
From: MONROVIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760240/aaaabijv.tel
Line Count: 130
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 MONROVIA 1051
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 JUN 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <18 OCT 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VISIT OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLAKE TO LIBERIA
TAGS: OTRA, OCON
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006